

Boroughbred Behavior Resources



Issue: Tips for Hyperactive Cat Owners

Cats have all types of personalities. Some are mellow and are perfect TV companions, some may have occasional “zoomies” where they sprint from one end of the home to the other, and some may act like Olympic champions! If your cat is bouncing off walls, pouncing on ankles, playing with cable wires, knocking things off counter tops, meowing for attention during bed-time hours, or fighting off invisible spirits, you definitely got yourself the champion of all cats. These behaviors are completely normal, and are a result of their natural predatory instincts. Cats are born to be on the move so when they have excess energy with nowhere for that energy to go, an environment without stimulus can contribute to destructive behaviors. Here are some steps you can take to increase mental and physical stimulation in the home.

Structured Play Sessions

Play therapy is a great way to entertain your cat and prevent them from getting into trouble. It will also strengthen the bond with you and your cat. Two 10 minute play sessions a day is usually sufficient, but you may need to extend the duration of the play sessions depending on how active your cat is. Wand-type toys are great because they allow for vigorous, stimulating exercise while keeping human hands at a safe distance. Use the toy to mimic prey-like movement to grab their attention; move the toy behind objects to encourage your cat to seek it out, play hide-n-seek, or wave it in the air! Some cats like chasing things down low whereas others like leaping in the air, so pay attention to your cat's play preferences.

Always give your cat the opportunity for successful captures throughout the game. A laser pointer is great at directing their energy, but keep in mind it may cause frustration if they don't get the satisfaction of “catching their prey”. To prevent building frustration, toss a plush toy at the direction of the laser so they have the chance to pounce and catch something physical, allowing them to release their inner wild cat onto the item. Try to avoid abruptly ending play sessions because it may also cause frustration if your cat's momentum has just started to build up. Do your best to slow the action down towards the end of the play session so they can gradually wind down. It's always good to give your cat a few treats or even a small meal after play time so they reap the rewards of their “hunt”.

Puzzle Feeders

Cats out in the wild use their energy to hunt for their next meal but since most indoor cats have meal time set up for them, their pent up instinctive behavior gets channeled onto whatever is around their confined household. Many cat owners either free-feed or have scheduled feeding times for their cat, but why not make your cat work for their food? Working for food is natural for a hunter, so allow them to use their senses and physical skills by providing puzzle feeders, which are basically food dispensing toys. Not only do they keep them mentally and physically stimulated, it's a delicious, fun and engaging yummy activity for them. If your cat tends to eat really fast, these will also force them to eat slowly. There are many different types of puzzle feeders you can purchase at pet stores or online, but you can also make your own! This link: <https://www.purina.com/articles/cat/feeding/diy-cat-puzzle-feeder> provides various examples on how to make them out of regular house-hold items.

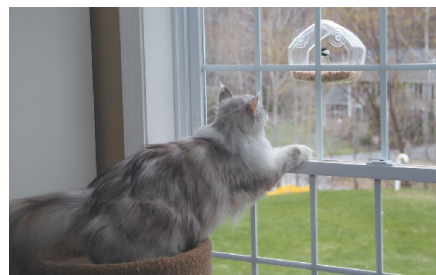
When first introducing your cat to a puzzle feeder, mix some of their favorite treats in with their food to get them excited and eager to figure out how to get the food out. Make it easy enough for them to succeed so they'd be more likely to use it again in the future. Once they've figured out how to use the puzzle feeder, you can gradually make it a little more difficult by making the holes smaller so they'd have to put in more effort to access the food. Always make the holes large enough so the food can fall through and avoid making the puzzle feeder too difficult because your cat may just give up. We want this activity to be FUN. When they've become proficient in using the puzzle feeder, you can transition out the treats and use their normal food.

Provide Opportunities to Explore

Cats love to climb and enjoy being on elevated locations. Providing extra walkways and vertical space will drastically increase the size of your home in their eyes and will give them their own feline-specific routes to climb, jump and zoom around. Offer cat trees and designated shelves for cat exploration. Place treats or puzzle feeders around these areas to encourage them to search and work for their meal. Who doesn't enjoy treasure hunting?

Visual Enrichment

Humans spend a lot of time watching TV, so why not provide your cat with their own version? Set up a bird feeder outside a window and provide a perch for your cat next to the window inside. It's a sure way to keep your kitty entertained for hours. It may also turn into their new favorite nap spot.



Consider Adopting a Cat Friend

If your cat is the only pet in your home, adding another cat to the family can be a great way to provide your cat with companionship, which can thwart mischievous behavior caused by boredom. It's important, however, to think about the responsibility of having two cats and to find a cat that matches the energy level of your current cat. If you adopt a cat with a low energy level, your current cat may end up driving the new-comer nuts. Introducing a new cat will take time and patience, so be sure you're able to dedicate the time needed to do a gradual and positive introduction. Remember to never rush the introduction process because you want to give them a reason to like each other. Once they've been properly introduced, they could keep each other active, offer social interactions, and other types of mental stimulation. Please see our **Introducing Cat to Cat** flyer for more information.

Related Flyers: **Environmental Enrichment, Preventing Destructive Behaviors**

Resources:

<https://www.catbehaviorassociates.com/what-is-environmental-enrichment-and-why-does-your-cat-need-it/>
<https://www.catbehaviorassociates.com/how-to-introduce-your-cat-to-puzzle-feeders/>

For more information:

International Association of Animal Behavior Consultants: <https://m.iaabc.org/>
Certified Applied Animal Behaviorists: <http://corecaab.org/>